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THE PRINCIPLES AND PROBLEMS OF GOVERNMENT

By P. G. NUTTING

IN living up to its possibilities, the chief ends to be secured by a sovereign state through the national government are national stability, strength and progress. Its chief problems relate to ways and means of securing these objectives. Some of these problems have been fairly well solved, others cry aloud for solution. Let us examine them from the standpoint of the engineer—applying fundamental principles to the general problem and to the more vital individual problems.

1. *National Stability.*—National stability requires that national authority be absolutely supreme over that of any individual or organization—political, commercial, religious or protective, within its jurisdiction. Each such organization or individual must regard the interests of the nation above its own. No mere confederation of states can possess stability unless individual states recognize the supreme authority of the nation. No nation can be stable if a strong commercial organization, such as a food trust, is so powerful as to be able to defy its authority. The same is true of a labor organization. Some few religious organizations have not always subordinated their interests to the interests of the nation, or else have wrongly identified their own interests with those of the nation. Many political organizations have placed party interests above those of the public at large. All such conditions constitute a menace to the stability of the nation as a whole.

While a nation can not be inherently stable without supreme authority, it can not attain the maximum of stability without denying every special privilege to every class, individual or organization. Not only must every organization, class or individual recognize the supreme rights of the nation, but equality of rights with its fellows. Any preferential treatment anywhere must lead to instability. From time to time aggregations of wealth have claimed special privileges, causing threats of upheaval. At present, the greatest menace to the nation appears to be in certain labor organizations which claim special privileges by encouraging and defending such crimes as murder, theft and the destruction of property when committed by

their own members against outsiders. The very attitude of one law for us, another for the outsider, can not be tolerated. The abolition of special privileges means equal rights and privileges to all and the enforcement of law without regard to wealth, class, race or organization. While equality of rights, in this sense, was expressly recognized and guaranteed in our constitution, it has never been completely established. Its establishment to the very letter offers many serious problems, but is essential in securing stability. In their attitude toward authority, efficient democracy and autocracy are alike, but in relation to special privilege they stand at opposite extremes as they do also in regard to the source of authority.

Every nation has its own peculiar problems in special privileges to solve, for in no nation have these been entirely eliminated. In some cases it is inherited class privilege, in others race and in still others organized labor—all more or less interwoven with special privilege exercised by wealth or political machines. Church domination has been a burning issue in the past and still is an issue in some nations. Both labor organizations and capitalists quite generally claim special privileges and each class is desperately striving to reduce and circumscribe those of the other class. American, British and Russian labor organizations fail to understand each other or to act together since the issues before each are essentially different. Each would be a tower of strength to its national government if each aimed and strove merely for the entire abolition of privilege.

While the complete abolition of special privilege is clearly a necessary and sufficient condition for national stability as a principle, yet the application of that principle in separate cases is not so obvious. Individual equality of rights before the law is one of the simplest and earliest recognized. Whether to workman or millionaire, master or servant, Jew or Gentile, black, yellow or white, party henchman or opponent, the law must be administered without personal or class favor. The principle is nearly as old as the human race, but even to-day, in America, the police and the lower courts are not entirely beyond the reach of personal influence. Equality of rights between corporations and between individuals and organizations has not yet been so clearly defined as between individuals, yet the same principle applies.

A very difficult problem of the near future in practically all nations concerns the abolition of special privilege in *property rights*. Labor is everywhere disputing with capital the assumed right and privilege of the latter to the sole disposition

of profits. Strikes, walkouts and widespread socialism are evidence that no rational, acceptable general solution of the problem has been reached. Labor desires remuneration without responsibility, hence requests a higher wage and shorter hours. Capital has generally accepted responsibility for profits, but in most large corporations is amply safeguarded against loss. But profits depend primarily upon good management and where such management is vested in salaried experts, these are entitled to such consideration as is accorded labor and capital. Equity in this case evidently demands that profits go to those who must shoulder responsibility for losses, but since that responsibility is variously apportioned in different organizations, no general solution of the problem appears possible.

The special privilege of one class to live in idleness at the expense of another class—an inheritance from feudal times—is still assumed in many countries and is the basis of widespread unrest. Such a privilege has not even a biological foundation since statistics show that leaders are born practically equally in all classes. A partial solution of the problem involves the abolition of hereditary titles, a high tax on incomes not under the expert direction of the owner and a very high or confiscatory inheritance tax on inheritances not going to dependent heirs.

2. *National Strength.*—While national stability comes largely from the elimination of misdirected static forces, national power is due largely to bulk of resources and to efficient administration. The resources that are effective include not only natural resources such as mineral and agricultural, timber and fisheries, but financial and intellectual resources and labor. The strength that lies in each may be great or little according to its conservation, development and utilization. These of course depend largely upon wise administration, direct in some cases, and through commercial and industrial organizations in others. It is the essential function of administration, in securing the general welfare, to see that the most possible is made of resources of all kinds. Comprehensive surveys determine resources while other departments regulate utilization, economic readjustments being made from time to time when necessary. Any one of the classes of resources above mentioned may range in value from absolute waste up to at least many times its worth at the present time, according to how it is handled.

The vital factor in making the most of our resources is of course expert direction. A poorly managed industrial organi-

zation will rapidly decline, but a poorly governed country may persist through its sovereignty. However, if a country is to live up to its possibilities, it must adopt the methods of successful industrial plants and have every important department managed by an expert. Administration consists essentially in solving an endless series of special problems. It calls for the services of engineers of all kinds, men who are at once thoroughly versed in the fundamental principles of their respective lines and experienced in the practical application of those principles. Some of these applications involve only routine repetition of previous applications. Others require study and investigation to determine which principles are applicable. Still others involve the most difficult research by master minds into the very fundamentals of the subject to uncover new principles. Hence the labor of administration ranges in quality from mere clerical and statistical work to fundamental scientific research in biology, psychology, geology, chemistry and physics. The experts required must be for the most part developed within the service itself after receiving a thorough preparatory training in the best appropriate educational institutions. Obviously, selection for the higher positions should be on the basis of fitness alone.

Both strength and stability require the coupling of authority and responsibility in proportion. The fatal defect in the so-called representative system of government is that while it may delegate authority it does not fix responsibility. Our office holders are not in office as a life work, with success or failure in life depending upon the wisdom of every decision. They have little to lose by mistakes and little to gain by a wise and faithful performance of their duties since they are quite likely to be superseded at any election. It is obviously the wise course to put the best experts available in every position of authority, place entire responsibility for their work upon them and leave them there until called to a higher position or until replaced by one more fit. It is doubtless possible to secure all the advantages of an autocratic government together with those of an efficient democracy by the wise selection and promotion of experts in administration. Democracy requires only that the *ultimate* authority rest directly with the people. A government with experts in authority, each assuming full responsibility for his work and subject to the ultimate authority of the people, represents the highest ideal of a republic.

Before proceeding to the discussion of factors in national progress, it may be well to consider a few of the greater na-

tional problems involving stability and strength, assuming that special privileges have been abolished, that the best available experts are in authority and that each is saddled with a responsibility that will bring forth his best efforts. One of the greatest of these problems concerns the relation of the government to national means of communication, information and transportation. The objective in each case is of course the maximum of public service at a reasonable expense. Efficiency depends in each case upon good management and wise expenditure. The matter of ownership has little to do with either. If better results have been attained under private ownership, it is to be attributed rather to better administration by better executives secured by means of higher salaries and better systems of selection and promotion. On the other hand, government administration has secured better coordination of effort. The interests of the public doubtless demand national control and control of a more intimate nature than the occasional exercise of ultimate authority.

Another great national problem relates to the best means of exercising ultimate authority by the people. In this problem are involved radical modifications of our present law-making and executive systems. Useful and effective laws could doubtless better be drafted by small bodies of well informed, experienced specialists in law drafting, men capable of correctly analyzing conditions to be remedied and of devising and framing laws for their alleviation than by unwieldy bodies of inexperienced delegates. For purposes of ratification, it is possible that Congress and the various state legislatures would serve better than frequent general elections in carrying out the will of the people. With administrative offices filled by appointment, partisan politics would largely disappear. The natural political parties are the conservative and the progressive and these are sufficient for all practical purposes in determining whether or not to take any new step contemplated. In our individual policies, the question constantly arising is whether or not to undertake some suggested line of activity and we are progressive or conservative according to the resultant of the political forces influencing us. The origin of each suggestion is of very little moment.

Representative government, as at present constituted, is but a weak and inefficient makeshift at best. It secures ultimate authority for the people, but in avoiding the evils of class autocracy has left us at the mercy of political bosses and machines. We have clean elections as a rule, but no means of

securing the best men available for the positions to be filled. Although open to objection, it would seem far preferable to have executives selected by some higher executive or board by promotion according to demonstrated ability than to childishly leave that selection to self-seeking politicians having no delegated authority and entirely without responsibility to the state. If it will but purge itself of special privilege—whether of birth, wealth or political organization—democracy is sure to exhibit administrative strength far in excess of that of the best devised imperialism.

3. *National Progress.*—The administration of the affairs of a nation should not only secure a maximum of stability and strength, but should direct the utilization of resources toward the greatest advance along all lines worth while. Obviously, if we are to make the most of our resources, those resources should be surveyed and studied with a view to their development for the greatest ultimate good of the nation as a whole. If we are neglectful of means of progress, we are sure to be outdistanced in time by nations which are progressive.

Our great administrative departments and bureaus have been created in recognition of just these national requirements. While leaving something to be desired in coordination and efficiency, in the main they fit our needs and render excellent service. A few, such as the Census Bureau, the Geological Survey and the Coast Survey, are engaged mainly in *gathering information*. The majority are concerned chiefly with the conservation and *development of resources*. Others look after *general welfare* through safeguarding public health, providing communication, national defense and transportation and regulating immigration, commerce, labor, banking, industrial organization and finance.

It is patent to every one that this work calls for the services of specialists and that greater results will be more efficiently obtained the greater the technical knowledge, skill and application of those specialists and the less the interference with their work by laymen. The nature of the work ranges from the purely administrative and clerical to scientific work of the most advanced and difficult nature. A considerable part of it has to do with the application of fundamental scientific principles to difficult technical problems and this involves a vast amount of research work. The government machinery should be such that the services of the greatest specialists in the country could be obtained and retained to carry on this work.

As it is, quite a number of the departmental bureaus are

headed by civilians chosen for their fitness alone and retained for their competency. These are doing excellent service. Others are headed by political appointees or staffed by henchmen and are examples of what should never be tolerated. Some have clear-cut fields of activity while others are sadly in need of reorganization and of coordination with bureaus engaged in similar lines of work. Some lines of government work urgently needed have never been undertaken at all. Some bureaus engaged in technical work lose annually to the industries from twenty to fifty per cent. of their staffs—as large a percentage as a university. To meet this condition it would seem advisable to organize such departments as a sort of great national university to draw greater numbers of choice research students, providing more timber from which to make up losses and from which to choose specialists for the higher positions.

A serious defect in many bureaus, resulting in far less than the best possible service to the public, comes from lack of direct contact with the public needs. Many industries, for example, would call on the government for expert advice and assistance but for the fact that it is not obtainable. On the other hand, the government has not made provision to meet such demands, chiefly because they were not made. It is precisely the dilemma of the repairs to the leaky roof. The government should provide for actual rather than expressed needs by building up strong, consistent, well-coordinated departments.

A number of important fields of general welfare, nearly or quite neglected by the government, might well be under its supervision and control. Conspicuous among these is education—mental, physical and moral. Common school education, now left to the several states, is in fairly good shape but higher education has been left to a large number of independent colleges and universities with but little even of unity of plan or purpose and to a considerable extent competitive. It is the obvious duty of the government to assume the leadership in this matter, retaining in its services the greatest specialists in the country, setting standards and conducting researches in methods of instruction and management. The practical education of the public through newspapers, magazines, lectures and motion pictures is left entirely to the private enterprise of money seekers. Physical education is left almost entirely to the instincts of the individual. Moral education is left to parental instruction, widely varying in quality and quantity, and to various religious organizations more or less at war with each other.

With the national welfare as its avowed objective and with

ways and means fairly obvious to those responsible for securing it, the really difficult problem is the judicious limitation of governmental activities to avoid stultifying paternalism in the regulative functions and interference with private interests in assisting the industries. In the past we have undoubtedly erred in doing too little, partly from principle but mostly through lack of expert knowledge. But with the pioneer period past and marked general tendencies developed in accord with conditions as they exist and are likely to persist, the time has come for a firmer grasp of our national destiny. We must do more than merely safeguard constitutional rights and trust to individual initiative. We must exert ourselves to the utmost to secure our national strength, stability and progress. In dealing with immigration, public health and education, for example, we must not be too tender of individual rights and privileges. In its relation to the agricultural, mining and manufacturing industries, the rôle of the government is not only that of the leading authority but of technical adviser, stimulator and regulator as well. Industrial development will mainly follow the lines of commercial interest with little regard to either the general welfare or to the distant future.

Among the most difficult of national problems are those concerning the relation of the nation to organizations—industrial, financial, political, religious, labor and racial—within it. National stability requires that national authority be supreme over every internal organization, whether that organization be a state or group of states, a power trust or group of related interests, a religious or racial organization attempting divided allegiance or a protective association of individuals. National strength requires that all such organizations be devoted to the general welfare rather than to selfish class interests. National progress requires that their activities be carefully directed, either by their own officers or by the national government and freely regulated by the government whenever necessary.

To secure such results, very little efficient constructive legislation has been enacted. While laws regulating the activities of individuals are abundant and effective, the corresponding laws dealing with organizations are few and ineffective. The Sherman Law, dealing with industrial organizations, is a conspicuous example. This law aimed to protect the people from extortion by monopolies. Secret agreements have nullified all attempts to restore competition. Efficient production has been hampered and the public has not been protected against overcharges. Natural and useful combinations have been driven

to secretiveness and evasion. The nation should welcome the formation of strong effective commercial and manufacturing organizations, provided only the government keep a firm hand on the helm and secure for the public a reasonable proportion of the benefits derived from organization.

Another class of organizations are striving not so much for material advantage as to dominate the nation for the advantage of a particular race, religious sect or class. These are the most insidious and the most difficult to deal with. This nation was founded on the principles of complete civil, religious and political freedom, tolerance and equality. That very freedom has been taken advantage of by those protected by it in an attempt to pervert those principles by securing a strangle hold upon the throat of the nation. We have nursed a brood of reptiles and the sooner we rid ourselves of them the less difficult will it be. No simple regulative Sherman Law is indicated in this case, but a searching test of loyalty with drastic penalties attached.

The various means of securing a maximum of national stability, strength and progress are utilized when individual ability is developed and utilized to the utmost. Perhaps our greatest weakness is too great a tolerance of incompetence in high places. Efficiency demands that not only competent but the *most* competent men available fill all positions of importance. In a pure autocracy no attempt is made to select the fittest for high places. In a pure democracy every place is in theory open to every one, but in practise the higher positions are clogged with incompetents and there are only occasional opportunities for clearing them out of the way. The principle is clear, but the best means of putting it in effect is one of the larger problems of the future.